

7
New Ideas

Paulina woke early the next morning. She felt happy and excited. She remembered Mma-Millipede's words, 'Be careful Paulina, my friend. Learn about growing tobacco. But study the man who is telling you about it. I believe Makhaya is a good man. But he is a foreigner and you must learn his ways.'

Very soon, Paulina was leading ten women towards the farm. They were all excited. All Botswana women like doing something new.

The women had brought their breakfast with them, tied in pieces of cloth – a little food, tea and powdered milk. They were soon ready to start work.

Maria came out of one of the huts. She looked very pretty and happy.

'How happy you look!' all the women cried. 'How does Gilbert kiss? Come on, tell us!'

Maria smiled and said, 'Please wait here for Makhaya. He's learning to plough with the tractor.'

So the women sat down again. Soon they were all drinking tea, talking and laughing together. But when Makhaya arrived, they all stood up and greeted him politely.

'Good morning,' Makhaya said in a friendly voice. 'Follow me, please.'

Makhaya took the women to a small plot where tobacco was already growing.

'You can all have a plot like this, in your own yard,'

38

Makhaya told them. 'But if we are going to make money, we'll need a hundred plots. That means a hundred women. And you will have to teach them.'

The women began to feel proud. They listened carefully as Makhaya went on talking.

'Look,' he said, 'this leaf is dark green now. But in three months' time it will be light green. Then it must be picked and dried. You can all help get this crop ready. Then you will know how to look after your own tobacco.'

'Where do we dry the leaves?' one woman asked.

'We must build a drying shed on every plot,' Makhaya explained. 'We've decided to build the first shed near the farm. Who has land near here?'

All the women looked at Paulina Sebeso. Makhaya looked too and saw her big, dark eyes and brightly coloured skirt.

'Yes, I live near the farm,' Paulina said quietly, looking down at the ground. Then Makhaya remembered where he had seen Paulina before.

'Where's the child?' he asked quietly.

'She's with Mma-Millipede,' Paulina answered.

Paulina led them all into her yard. Makhaya looked round for a place to build the shed. In one corner of the yard he found a little toy village that Paulina's little girl had made. Makhaya smiled at the little mud people and animals and the little paths for them to walk on.

Makhaya chose a place to build the drying shed. Gilbert had drawn a plan for the shed. Each shed was to be made of mud, which could be found anywhere. Each shed had two rooms. One room had wooden shelves for drying the leaves of the tobacco.

Makhaya told the women what to do and they began to

39



Makhaya chose a place to build the drying shed.

work. Makhaya made the shelves and Paulina mixed the mud. Soon Maria was there too, helping the women to build the thick, mud walls. All the women worked hard, quietly at first. Then they began to make more and more noise as they forgot that Makhaya was there.

At lunch-time, Maria told Paulina, 'I'm going home now to prepare some food. Tell Makhaya he can eat there.'

'Why can't Makhaya stay here?' Paulina asked. 'If he is working with us, he can eat with us!'

'But he doesn't like goat meat and sour-milk porridge³⁵,' Maria explained. 'Makhaya and Gilbert both eat it, but I know they don't like it.'

'Well, I think these foreigners should eat our food or starve,' Paulina said in a loud voice.

'Don't get angry,' Maria said.

Maria walked out of the yard and Paulina told the women to stop work. One of them made a fire to warm up the goat meat. Paulina walked over to Makhaya and said, 'Will you eat with us, sir?'

'Yes, thank you,' Makhaya said, without looking up. 'My name's Makhaya. What's yours?'

'I'm Paulina Sebeso,' she said. 'And we eat sour-milk porridge here. And goat meat, when we can get it. We sometimes eat meat with worms in it. We don't care – we wash the worms away!'

Makhaya saw that all the women were looking at him. He stood up so that he could look down on Paulina.

'Well, don't wash off the worms for me,' he said. 'I won't notice them.'

All the women shouted with laughter. Paulina, laughing too, ran away into one of the huts.

41